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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: REACTIONS TO 2005 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

REF: SECSTATE 33794

11. (U) SUMMARY. Reaction to the 2005 Human Rights Report was varied. The GOS reaction contrasted with last year, as MFA State Secretary Bozo Cerar called in COM to complain about passages in the Report on trafficking in persons, rape, and the government's relations with Slovenia's Muslim minority. Prime Minister Janez Jansa's reaction was more moderate and stressed the Report's positive evaluation of Slovenia. Media coverage was largely devoted to the section on Slovenia, which attracted considerably more attention than in previous years. This was particularly true of the Freedom of Speech and Press section, which became part of a larger debate by Slovenian journalists and media experts about a new law governing the Board of Slovenia's national radio and TV broadcaster, RTV Slovenija. Post encountered a wide palette of interpretations -- depending on whatever suited the individual interpreting the Report -- from Government officials, representatives of political parties and journalists. END SUMMARY.

GOS Reaction

12. (SBU) Deputy Foreign Minister Bozo Cerar called in Ambassador March 8 to express his dismay over the report. Cerar took particular exception to the information on trafficking in persons. He pointed out that the NGO Kljuc had indeed been fully funded by the end of the year, and that to the knowledge of the GOS, no victims had gone uncared for. All potential victims, too had been given every opportunity for assistance. (Comment. Cerar objected to the lines: "Kljuc, the country's sole NGO providing support to trafficking victims, organized a 3-day training for 13 prosecutors. Due to a government budgeting impasse for part of the year, Kljuc was forced to close its safe house and reported turning away 12 victims during the year." In writing the TIP report subsequent to the HRR, Post learned that while Kljuc had to close its emergency housing, the safe house, funded by the European Commission, remains open, and in fact, is currently housing one victim. Also, while Kljuc was not able to assist in person the 12 victims mentioned above, it was able to provide counseling over the phone. Kljuc also assisted by phone in helping the police on the scene to determine if any of the 12 potential victims was actually a victim of trafficking. The police asserted that four were indeed victims and offered them assistance. The victims declined to be housed by the police saying they felt safe in their current accommodation.)

13. (SBU) Cerar also took exception to characterizations of some problems, such as the incidence of rape in Slovenia and the issue of the land purchase for the mosque. The

Ambassador took great care to go over certain passages with the Deputy FM, and to explain our intentions in reporting them the way we did versus his interpretation of what was being said.

14. (U) Subsequently, Prime Minister Janez Jansa adopted a different tone, stating that "The Human Rights Report resembles the previous ones; on the whole, the Report is extremely positive. The Government has strived to eliminate these problems [mentioned in the Report]. If the state of human rights in Slovenia were compared to the state of human rights in the country that authored the Report, [the state of human rights in Slovenia] would be assessed as considerably better."

15. (U) Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) deputy Branko Grims claimed he was content with the report and particularly pleased with the statement that "the media were active and independent but did not express a broad range of political views," which he interpreted at a press conference as "the media [in Slovenia] were independent, indeed quite independent, they were active, but did not present a wide spectrum of political views. To put it simply: the media in Slovenia are absolutely free, but not as plural as all of us would like." (NOTE: Grims' press conference featured the above-quoted sentence from the Report in approximately 72-font letters. END NOTE.) In Grims' opinion, the above-quoted sentence "confirms that first steps were made in the right direction last year [with the passage of the law on national radio and television]."

16. (U) In the opinion of the Human Rights Ombudsman, Matjaz Hanzek, "the report is nice [towards Slovenia], but less so than in previous years." Hanzek also noted that the Report confirmed the assessments made by his office.

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Opposition Reaction

17. (U) Initial reactions to the Report by the leading coalition were reserved: the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) did not wish to comment; New Slovenia (NSi) noticed some constants which repeated themselves every year, and emphasized that the Government worked hard on resolution of the "erased" issue, while asylum policy was being adjusted to European standards.

18. (U) Opposition political parties used the Report to criticize the current government. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDS) issued a statement saying it is "concerned with the reduction of the field of freedom in society, for it leads to the violation of human rights... The report confirms our criticism of the government, and assesses those negative phenomena ... which we warned about when the law on radio and TV was drafted, the anticorruption commission eliminated, and asylum standards lowered." In the opinion of Social Democrats (SD), the situation in Slovenia is worse than presented in the Report. The Report fails to caution against hate speech, the government's decision to terminate financial support for certain NGOs, and verbal attacks on the Ombudsman.

Media Freedom Section Elicits Heavy Commentary

19. (U) The new Chairman of the Program Board of Slovenian National Radio and Television, Stane Granda, assured the press that he did not feel any pressure from the Government or Parliament. Reacting to the section on media freedoms, he said: "Does America want to tell Europe what to do?"

America has exerted cultural and scientific violence upon European culture and science. ... I find such reports amusing, but I do not identify myself with America in any way. To be honest, I do not pay any attention to American assessments."

¶10. (U) The president of the Association of Slovenian Journalists, Gregor Repovz, said that the Association "is waiting for Prime Minister Janez Jansa, Minister of Culture Vasko Simoniti, and Parliamentarian Branko Grims (author of the Law on National Radio and TV) to say that the Association mislead the State Department; as it had always said when an important international institution made a remark about any media-related activity of the Slovenian government. In general, we can only unhappily assert that assessments in the Report are accurate. We are unhappy because the Report -- in this section -- is more negative than in previous years. It should also be emphasized that pressure on the media is growing and that the most recent events have not been included in the Report."

¶11. (U) In the opinion of professor of journalism and communication Sandra Basic Hrvatin, "the situation in Slovenia is as described."

¶12. (U) The media reported extensively about the Report, but largely refrained from comment, except to make remarks about the state of human rights in the United States. The weekly "Mladina," for example, says: "The United States is the major violator of human rights. ... However, although it is hypocritical that the United States is warning about human rights, critical assessments made by the State Department are not insignificant and point at the instances in which human rights violations really do occur." The daily "Delo" opines in a commentary by Janko Lorenci: "Because of its own human rights violations, America has lost much credibility in recent years. Nevertheless, we presume that the Americans did not advise our government to address the purported absence of media plurality by reducing freedom of speech, and to do it in [such] a manner."

Public Diplomacy Efforts

¶13. (U) The Embassy's public diplomacy efforts included the publication of the Report on post's website and sending extensive outreach emails with copies of the Report to government and civil society leaders. In addition, poloff granted several interviews to the media, including print

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dailies "Dnevnik" and "Vecer" and Radio Slovenia, to highlight the important role that the Report plays as an informational tool highlighting human rights concerns and spurring support for improvements among the public, the media, and government. Seeking to clarify the competing interpretations of the Report's views on the new law on national radio and TV, poloff stressed that the Report itself made no mention of the law's effect on media coverage. Poloff also noted that the presence of political and economic pressures on the media had been mentioned in previous years' reports and therefore were not new to this year's Report.